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United States Marine Corps  
Command and Staff College  
Marine Corps University  
2076 South Street  
Marine Corps Combat Development Command  
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**TITLE:**

**Mission Command: Making it Work at Battalion Level**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
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**AUTHOR: Captain Heath Major, United States Army**

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Charles D. McKenna, Ph.D.

Approved: [Signature]

Date: 27 MARCH 2013

Oral Defense Committee Member: Craig Swanson, PhD

Approved: [Signature]

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## *Executive Summary*

**Title:** Mission Command: Making it Work at Battalion Level

**Author:** Captain Heath Major, United States Army

**Thesis:** Due to a disproportionate amount of experiences, lack of consistent training, and lack of development in meta-competencies at the battalion level, battalion commanders will not be able to conduct mission command unless they execute collective staff training and team building exercises, implement officer professional development programs, and emphasize and enforce standards through counseling and evaluations.

**Discussion:** There is a lot of discussion about the ability to execute Mission Command in the Armed Forces. The United States Army has taken the concept of mission command and embedded it into doctrine and is now attempting to operate within it. There are currently some flaws in application that this paper lays out for the reader. First, how will battalion level commanders bridge the gap between him/her, the staff, and subordinate commanders in shared experience and common knowledge? Commanders will likely return to the basics of doctrine and an emphasis on training management. Then, professional military educators must educate all levels of leaders on what mission command is and what is not. Inculcation of mission command must start from the beginning of professional military education and never stops. Finally, development of leader's attributes will be necessary through counseling and evaluations, not just by the required reports, but by performance based evaluations such as after action reviews.

**Conclusion:** Senior leaders must reinvigorate their junior leaders on the importance of training management, train with and be comfortable with doctrine, develop and embed mechanisms that will allow leaders to interact with one another, and develop leadership competencies that strengthen the organization. Mission command as a philosophy, a system and a warfighting function can become the keystone to Joint force 2020. We have time to achieve that goal. Our goals are not short-sighted and identifying our shortfalls can be instrumental to making changes for the next generation of warriors.

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## *Preface*

I wanted to study the concept of mission command and its implementation in the Army. During examination, I found myself focusing on the principles of mission command and whether our current Armed Forces can operate within the concept of mission command. I have provided insights from the National Training Center, obtained resources from Command and General Staff Colleges, as well as curriculum from the Captains Career Courses to provide a look at the Professional Military Education System and operational aspect of mission command to give a holistic assessment at how the force will inculcate mission command into our leaders. In the end, I hope I have provided a document to encourage discussions of how to operationalize mission command and apply it at the battalion level.

I would like to thank Dr. Charles D. McKenna for his mentorship and approach to allow me to find the purpose of my paper. To COL James J. Gallivan, your steadfast devotion to development of organizations and individuals under your tenure is admired by those around you; thank you for your time and mentorship, you have made me a better leader. LTC Mike Lewis and LTC JR Deimel; I greatly appreciate your candid and timely feedback. Most importantly, I would like to thank my wife, Julie. Her understanding and support throughout the years has been immeasurable. She is truly a remarkable person. Her encouragement makes me strive to be a better leader, but most importantly to be a better husband and father.

## **Introduction:**

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin A. Dempsey wants the force to operate within the context of mission command. That is to say mission command is not a mechanical process; it is a continual cognitive effort to understand, to adapt and to direct actions effectively to accomplish the intent of the mission.<sup>1</sup> Mission Command is a learned behavior and must be imprinted from the start of service. Mission Command is “Applicable across the range of military operations, it is executed by adaptive leaders...enabled by shared experience, doctrine, education and training.”<sup>2</sup> At levels such as Corps, Division, and even Brigades, operating within the principles of mission command seems relatively easy. Operating within the principles of mission command from Brigade to Battalions also seems relatively straightforward. After all, everyone’s experience levels are within a couple of years; during training the headquarters are close together and collaboration and team development can take place. Operations at this level are executed through mission type orders. The brigade commander provides his intent to the brigade operations officer and the order goes out to the battalions. The relationships among leader teams at the brigade and battalions are established through building rapport with one another. However, there is currently a rift in exercising mission command at battalion level. Some leaders understand this and make concerted efforts to instill the principles of mission command through very methodical methods. Sometimes, however, draconian measures must be taken to develop the environment necessary to facilitate mission command. If the Army wants to inculcate our tactical units with mission command then steps need to be taken to ensure the foundation is in place to foster the environment necessary to bring to life the philosophy of mission command.

This paper is designed to provide “a way” to accomplish mission command at the battalion level, which has the potential to be the most problematic echelon in which to execute it.

Due to a disproportionate amount of experiences and limited amount of common knowledge between a battalion commander, his subordinate commanders, and his staff; the lack of consistent training and training management; and lack of development in meta-competencies of leadership at the battalion level, battalion commanders will find it very difficult to conduct mission command. There are currently some flaws in understanding and application of mission command that this paper lays out for the reader. First, how will battalion level commanders bridge the gap in shared experience and common knowledge? Some might return to the basics of doctrine and an emphasis on training management. Then, professional military education must inculcate all levels of leaders on what mission command is and what it is not. This starts from the beginning of professional military education and never stops. Finally, development of leaders' attributes must occur through counseling and evaluations, not just through required reports but also by performance based evaluations such as after action reviews.

In his Mission Command White Paper, General Dempsey states, "In mission command the commander must understand the problem, envision the end-state, and visualize the nature and design of the operation."<sup>3</sup> He speaks about a commander centric organization in which the commander will develop a shared vision and understanding with his staff. Through the mutual understanding of the problem and a vested interest in the solution to particular problem, the staff and subordinate units will own the problem and focus efforts to solve the problem with innovative ideas and great initiative. By understanding the commander's intent and by having a shared vision of desired outcomes the staff provides forces with resources to accomplish the mission. In a perfect organization, one that understands and applies the tenets of mission command, staffs and commanders are on the same level of understanding. However, it takes a great deal of time and energy to form a team based on the mutual trust necessary to operate this

way. The principles of mission command are ones that are echoed across all the services in one form or fashion, such as shared vision, understanding intent, mutual trust, accepting prudent risks, but it will be the inculcation and practical application of these principles that will pose the greatest obstacle to embracing mission command at battalion level.

The principles of mission command are not new; it will provide commonality amongst the services as we move toward Joint Force 2020.<sup>4</sup> As the joint force becomes more interdependent, it is essential that the services have commonality about how they command, control, collaborate and synchronize finite resources in the next eight years. This philosophy begins with the principles of understanding, intent and trust.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, is mission command applicable in its fullest sense at all echelons of command?

### **What is Mission Command?**

Army doctrine defines mission command as the “exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations.”<sup>6</sup> Mission Command can be broken down into two categories: a philosophy and a warfighting function. As a philosophy of command it emphasizes the human domain. Successful commanders understand that their leadership directs the development of teams and helps to establish mutual trust and shared understanding throughout the force. Commanders provide a clear intent to their forces that guides subordinates’ actions while promoting freedom of action and initiative.<sup>7</sup>

Commanders influence the situation and provide direction and guidance, they encourage subordinates to take action, and they accept prudent risks to create opportunity and to seize the initiative. This is the ideal goal of every organization in the services but essential variables need to be mentioned. A common knowledge base and a thorough understanding of the commander’s intent are essential to mission command.<sup>8</sup> These variables must be developed through education

at all levels, rigorous training immersed in doctrine, and experience to apply these principles effectively to achieve mission command.

The people are the essential pieces that bridge the gap between philosophy and the warfighting function in the system. Mission command operates more on self-discipline than imposed discipline.<sup>9</sup> Self-discipline is an ideal that most officers attempt to develop. It is with these officers that commanders can implement mission command. However, it is unlikely that a commander will have an organization full of self-motivated individuals to accomplish this. To help mitigate this potential problem the commander must establish his mission command system. The mission command system is the arrangement of personnel, networks, information systems, processes and procedures, and facilities and equipment that enable commanders to conduct operations. It is the checks and balances of personnel within the system that help curtail those unable to self start or maintain momentum once begun. The system is the mechanism embedded in mission command that allows for a feedback loop to make ‘course corrections’ as necessary.<sup>10</sup> The inputs into the system are from the mission command tasks. Those tasks include: conduct the operations process: plan, prepare, execute, and assess; conduct knowledge management and information management; conduct, inform, and influence activities; and conduct cyber electromagnetic activities. The system and the tasks taken together create the warfighting function of mission command.<sup>11</sup> The warfighting function of mission command assists commanders in balancing the art of command with the science of control, while emphasizing the human aspects of mission command.

The mission command warfighting function integrates the other warfighting functions of movement and maneuver, intelligence, fires, sustainment, and protection into a coherent whole.<sup>12</sup> By itself, the mission command warfighting function will not secure an objective, move a

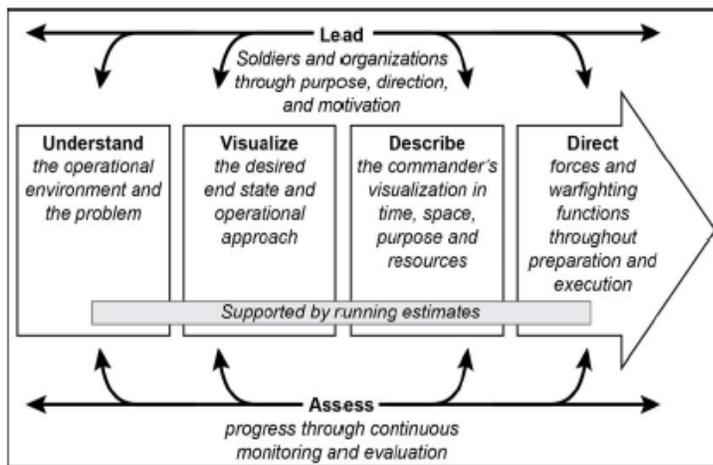
friendly force, or restore an essential service to a population. Instead, it provides purpose and direction to the other warfighting functions. Commanders use the mission command warfighting function to help achieve objectives and accomplish missions.<sup>13</sup>

### **Principles of Mission Command**

In exercising mission command, commanders are guided by six principles: build cohesive teams through mutual trust, create shared understanding, provide a clear commander's intent, exercise disciplined initiative, use mission orders, and accept prudent risk. The paper will examine each of these principles in turn.

How does an organization form a cohesive team through mutual trust? First, there must be a common command philosophy in the organization from division level and below. If the architecture of the organization does not subscribe to the concept of mission command, it will make executing mission command at the lower echelons nearly impossible.<sup>14</sup> There are some key factors that must come into play. The lower level organization such as a battalion must ensure they nest their ethos with the brigade and ultimately division. If the battalion commander cannot or does not have a relationship with the brigade that fosters the development of the organization then mission command will not work holistically. He must cultivate an environment of trust both horizontally as well as vertically. This is to say that building a team happens not only internally but externally with adjacent units. The leader development approach and leader empowerment must be supported throughout the organization. The leader development can be supported or undermined depending on how the battalion's collective training is organized. If understanding, trust, and intent are emphasized and followed-up through embedding and reinforcing mechanisms, at echelon, this can be done. Doctrine provides the services with the reinforcing mechanisms of the operations process. The commander plays a vital role in the planning process when he properly executes the commander's activities.

During the operations process the commander executes his activities, which include visualize, describe and direct while continually leading and assessing the situation.<sup>15</sup> Through



**Figure 1: ADRP 5-0: The Operations Process**

these activities, the commander will provide clear intent and refine the intent through guidance to the staff and subordinate commanders. The operations process of plan, prepare, execute and assess provide the necessary feedback loop that is integral to ensuring the staff maintains a shared understanding of the problem.<sup>16</sup> Intent is defined as clear and concise expression of the purpose of the operation and the desired military end state that supports mission command, provides focus to the staff, and helps subordinate and supporting commanders act to achieve the commander's desired results without further orders, even when the operation does not unfold as planned.<sup>17</sup> If the commander fails to execute his activities during the operations process there will be a lack of guidance to the organization. Guidance is critical to facilitating understanding and a lack of guidance leads to confusion and often lends itself to initiative on the part subordinate leaders but not necessarily in accordance with commander's intent because it was not clear and concise. The opposite reaction to lack of guidance may also occur and subordinates will fail to take the initiative due to fear of retribution. Both situations can negatively impact the organization and maybe detrimental to the accomplishment of the mission.

Creating shared understanding can prove to be a difficult task if the commander's relationship with his staff and subordinate commanders is strained. This relationship is most

often noticed from external evaluations during training center rotations or situational training exercises. Often in the training environment such as the National Training Center, the Observers, Coaches and Trainers, or OC/Ts provide insights to the battalions on their performance based on the warfighting functions in a formalized after action review. The shared understanding in many organizations only comes from training together and reflecting on how the organization did and learning from it. Through the learning process the organization updates processes, procedures, and systems to mitigate the weaknesses identified during the after action review. If the battalion leadership was newly formed, observers often notice that processes, in which shared understanding is normally facilitated, such as working groups or update briefs, were not productive. Newly created staffs often struggle to understand the commander's intent and develop orders to subordinate units to accomplish the intent. There needs to be a facilitator or an "enforcer" in the staff that drives the staff in a common direction.<sup>18</sup> The executive officer must be that individual. As second in command, his knowledge and shared experiences can enable him to provide added emphasis to the staff as to what the commander wants. Staffs must be meticulous when identifying what the operation's purpose, problems, and approaches are when attempting to solve them.<sup>19</sup>

The following historical vignette of mission command highlights a commander providing his guidance to a subordinate commander. Major General William T. Sherman and Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant had those essential variables necessary to execute mission command back in 1864. They had a similar educational background at West Point and shared experiences from fighting on the western front during the Civil War before coming together in 1864 for the Overland Campaign to defeat General Robert E. Lee and the Confederate Army.<sup>20</sup> Grant trusted

Sherman. Knowing Sherman would understand his intent, and that he had the competence to execute the mission allowed Grant more freedom and flexibility as a commander.

In a letter to MG William T. Sherman, dated 4 April 1864, LTG Ulysses S. Grant outlined his 1864 campaign plan. LTG Grant described MG Sherman's role: "It is my design, if the enemy keep quiet and allow me to take the initiative in the Spring Campaign to work all parts of the Army together, and, somewhat, toward a common center. . . You I propose to move against Johnston's Army, to break it up and to get into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their War resources. I do not propose to lay down for you a plan of Campaign, but simply to lay down the work it is desirable to have done and leave you free to execute in your own way. Submit to me however as early as you can your plan of operation."

MG Sherman responded to LTG Grant immediately in a letter dated 10 April 1864. He sent Grant, as requested, his specific plan of operations, demonstrating that he understood Grant's intent: "Your two letters of April 4th are now before me . . . That we are now all to act in a Common plan, Converging on a Common Center, looks like Enlightened War. . . . I will not let side issues draw me off from your main plan in which I am to Knock Joe [Confederate GEN Joseph E.] Johnston, and do as much damage to the resources of the Enemy as possible. . . I would ever bear in mind that Johnston is at all times to be kept so busy that he cannot in any event send any part of his command against you or [Union MG Nathaniel P.] Banks"<sup>21</sup>

The subordinate commander not only understood the intent but relayed that to his commander through a thorough confirmation brief, noting what he was going to do to accomplish his intent. Implicit communication is a very valuable thing and without it mission command will not work at any echelon. Confirmation briefs are an essential feedback tool that can enable a commander to ensure his subordinate commanders understand his intent. Far too often during training, commanders fail to factor in this very critical element due to lack of time.<sup>22</sup>

The other three principles of disciplined initiative, use of mission orders, and accepting prudent risk are also important. However, without the first three principles being codified within the organization, the latter three cannot be practiced. The disciplined initiative cannot be executed if the organization does not operate on trust, a shared understanding, or a clear intent. Mission orders would be wasted on a staff and subordinate commanders who would not be able to execute if the commander failed to execute the "commander's activities" during the operations process and give guidance throughout. Finally, if no trust exists in the organization, and intent is

not understood, a commander will not accept sensible risk if he could not provide the requisite guidance for his subordinates to act on.

### **Experience Matters**

Can a battalion commander create a team built on mutual trust, be fully confident in a subordinate commander separated by at least a decade of experience, and expect that subordinate to understand the problem as he does and execute based on his intent? The difference in experience between company commanders and their battalion commander plays a tremendous role in any individual's ability to understand a situation in context. Based on current trends of the Human Resource Command and their timeline templates for officers, most battalion commanders have about 16-18 years of service when they take command. A company grade officer can have between six and eight years of service. A decade is an enormous amount of time with respect to one's experience, training and education levels, and maturity. A battalion commander must be a teacher and a commander, to ensure a common knowledge base, such as doctrine and a shared understanding, mitigate this disproportionate amount of time. Understanding the commander is the first thing every junior officer must do. Then he can develop a rapport with the commander and understand his limits as a subordinate.

Building a relationship with a commander can be described as a checking account.<sup>23</sup> As a staff member or subordinate commander, accomplishing a mission means depositing credits into the account. This gives that member more latitude how to solve problems. A staff member or a subordinate commander makes these deposits by understanding his current constraints, understanding the intent based on a shared vision, and executing within the guidance given to him by the commander. The commander can use this analogy to evaluate and gain insights into the officers' strengths and weaknesses. This is not a slight on the officers but an assessment to provide the foundation for the shared understanding and vision that can develop. The

commander must develop a baseline for his staff and subordinate commanders. The converse is also very relevant if an officer in the staff or a subordinate commander fails to execute and continues to withdraw funds from his checking account with the commander. When those funds are depleted the commander needs to take action in the form of reducing the officer's ability to execute based on initiative and become more prescriptive and direct. This occurs at the company level every day as the company commander assesses his leaders. He observes, coaches, and teaches his leaders through daily involvement in the planning, preparation and execution portion of exercises. The best commanders will ensure during after action reviews that mistakes are brought up to be learned from and the leaders develop a plan of action to improve every day.

The shared understanding, whether it is in the context of training or normal operations at battalion level, must be nurtured through programs within the organization that foster learning. This can lead to a shared vision and a vested interest in the problem, training, or character of the battalion. You cannot get to this shared vision through destructive command structures; rather, only through structures based on dignity and respect can true shared vision be achieved. Destructive leaders are very draconian by nature. They foster a fearful and intimidated organization, which can breed distrust and not function smoothly. The battalion commander must be diligent in training his commanders about how he sees problems. A brigade commander, in contrast, has a seemingly easier task in gaining shared understanding and vision with his battalion commanders. In short, there may be more commonalities than differences between the brigade and battalion commanders based on training, education and the amount of time in the service. These commonalties often develop officers who think critically, and most importantly have a higher level of maturity.

It is not hard to see the challenges that a battalion commander may have to overcome to make mission command work at the battalion level. To get a battalion to the level of common experience that is necessary to operate within the philosophy of mission command will require a rigorous training program immersed in doctrine. The battalion commander must develop an individual and collective staff training program that will allow him to evaluate his staff and provide direction. His field grade officers must supervise this training program. The program must be implemented to build cohesion in the unit and with that unity of effort the staff can develop a shared understanding and vision to meet the commander's intent.

One of the most underutilized resources commanders and staff have is the Combined Arms Training System. This online digital system has every known mission essential task and its respective individual and collective tasks to accomplish the essential task. Based on the unit's mission essential task list the commander determines what training the battalion needs to accomplish. This help the staff frame a training plan, which requires feedback from subordinate commanders on how they are going to meet the Battalion Commander's intent.

### **Professional Military Education**

Doctrine is the first step in reestablishing the common knowledge for tactical operations. Currently, company grade and junior field grade officers lack familiarity with the vast majority of U.S. Army doctrine. During 26 rotations at the National Training Center, it was noticed that doctrine would not be followed during the operations process. This impacted performance at all levels.<sup>24</sup> As a community of professionals, we have begun to acknowledge this drift; now we must reset the course.<sup>25</sup> Additional professional education is not required to effect the leader's development but it would enhance the effectiveness if the company grade officers on the staff and in command understand how important the principles of mission command are in their relationships with adjacent units. The rejuvenation of training based on doctrine would benefit a

generation of officers who have diverted from doctrine and adapted tactics, techniques and procedures as the gospel. The Army recognized this degradation, and, in an attempt to assist leaders develop training plans, it has built the Army Training Network.<sup>26</sup> The Army Training Network is a web-based application that enables leaders to look up mission essential tasks and then put together training events that will accomplish the individual and collective tasks required to accomplish the mission essential task. This is institutional training that builds on the unit's ability to see itself and execute proper training management.

Professional Military Education plays a vital role for the soldiers in the process of becoming a professional. The amount of education provided to a captain at the Advanced Course is obviously less than the education that a battalion commander has received. The Advanced Course in the Professional Military Education curriculum currently provides the company grade officer with a focused core curriculum on command, roles and responsibilities and the operations process. This curriculum is essential for the company level officer; however, the operations process is missing a key element that the services used to provide in the Combined Arms and Services Staff School or CAS3. This program was no longer a required course as of 2004 due to the compelling needs of the operational force. The Army concluded that by incorporating a week long exercise in the Advance Course, the captains would gain the same insight into the planning process that they would get if they went to an additional course all together.<sup>27</sup> This was the optimal way, at the time, to get captains back to units to serve in staff positions before taking command. Many company commanders today have less than two years on any type of staff before they take command. A company grade officer's level of maturity and his ability to understand his role and responsibilities as a staff member or a commander will either enable or inhibit his ability to thrive in a mission command environment. To help him

along in this process the Army should re-evaluate its education process at company grade levels as the operational tempo slows down.

The battalion commander usually possesses a wealth of knowledge based on experiences, Professional Military Education, and sometimes advanced civil schooling. This allows the commander to expound on the justification behind an idea. The commander more than likely went to the combined arms and services staff school and understood the dynamics of a staff or working with peers from across the different services or branches. These educational programs have valuable lessons that are not necessarily learned when peers are of the same MOS or service. The battalion commander may also bring joint experiences to the organization that can enable his staff to think more imaginatively about situations. The commander's educational background can provide a staff and subordinate commanders with the context needed to articulate and attack a problem. The commander leads and assesses throughout the planning process, ensuring his organization operates in the framework of mission command, both philosophically and as a warfighting function.

To capitalize on the educational system within the military, the Army must begin inculcation of mission command at the company level. Company level officers must understand what mission command is and how to operate within it. This education does not stop when the officer leaves the educational environment; it continues and develops within an organization both laterally and vertically. To minimize the education gap, it is essential that ground work is laid at the company, reinforced at the field grade / intermediate educational level and reviewed at the Pre-Commander's Course for battalion level command. The Army needs to inculcate mission command in the professional education process and provide ways to practice operating within mission command through planning. The collaboration with fellow officers during staff training

in an educational setting provides an opportunity to learn before being thrust on to a battalion or brigade staff. On the job training is important but knowing the basics and exercising those fundamentals in a sterile environment is something that needs to be re-instated.

Most organizations have very few opportunities during home station training to conduct brigade level operations. This inhibits staff abilities to develop relationships within the brigade.<sup>28</sup> The National Training Center often was the first time that the battalion staff operated through its command posts and exercised the processes and functions required to support operations. The adult learning model lays out five principles: Learning is a transformation that takes place over time; it follows a continuous cycle of action and reflection; it is most effective when it addresses issues that are relevant to the learner; when people learn with others; and in a supportive and challenging environment.<sup>29</sup> If the first time an officer operates from a Command Post or displaces a Tactical Operations Center is during a rotation at the National Training Center, then the education and training failed to ensure that fundamental operational procedures were emplaced and executed to embed those critical capabilities into that young officer. The Army's processes must be tiered to achieve the goals necessary to operate under mission command.

Intermediate level education, the command and staff colleges, should build on the foundational education and provide a "tightening of the shot group" with regards to the operations process and the mission command system in tactical environments.<sup>30</sup> The field grades that attend the intermediate level education are the drivers of the system once commanders provide their intent. Field grades operationalize the commander's intent.<sup>31</sup> When conducting a quick inquiry into the current common core for the intermediate educations, one of the responses received was disheartening. "Mission Command is a phrase thrown around, but that is about it. I

couldn't even tell you what it means, and I will still graduate in six weeks.”<sup>32</sup> This was from a colleague at a four-month satellite courses. If field grade officers currently in the educational system are not learning how they influence mission command at battalion level, the Army will not meet the chairman’s intent to inculcate this philosophy into the force of this generation. We are currently missing a very important variable in the submersion of mission command in to the services, namely updating the curriculum for the services to emphasis the importance of mission command as a philosophy, warfighting function and a system in which the organization can conduct operations in an uncertain and complex future. Intermediate level education should focus on the application of doctrine, critical and creative thinking, encourage collaboration, and dialogue with peers. The Marine Corps Command and Staff College does this incredibly well. The irony is that the Marine Corps has not even incorporated the terminology of mission command into its doctrine. They are still examining the concept in relation to those things that shape how Marines think. They believe the philosophy of “mission command” is already in their ethos and is nothing new. The idea of it being a warfighting function is a different matter.<sup>33</sup> Even though it is not in their doctrine they are discussing and evaluating its relevance to their force.

The Professional Military Educational system continues to improve through self assessments and reviewing the curriculum to ensure the core items are being taught. As professionals, the Army should require that the learning environment is teaching the operations process to ensure it is learned. Once a company grade officer has the foundation for the operations process and understands mission command both as a philosophy and, by the Army’s approach, a warfighting function, they can begin on the job training and learn what the commander needs to fight his organization.

The team can begin to form, and through trial and error in training, the team can develop into a well defined system. To maintain this system and develop late arrivals to the system the organization must institute a professional development program. This program should not just be focused at battalion but nested with brigade and even division's development programs. This will help with the educational gap, provide a common knowledge base and continue to assist in operating within the principles of mission command. These leadership programs need to be designed to increase awareness of the organization and provide shared vision of roles and responsibilities of the entire organization. The invitation to an adjacent unit to discuss commonalities in how to operate within mission command could be a way to share ideas and build relationships. For example, all reconnaissance platoons from the infantry battalions could come to a reconnaissance and surveillance leader's professional development seminar given by the reconnaissance squadron in the brigade, where the topic is reconnaissance handover. The discussions and learning that could take place can build a relationship among all the organizations to facilitate common knowledge and shared understanding. This could lead to a standard operating procedure that everyone understands and embraces and allows for maintaining operational tempo during training exercises and real world deployments.

### **Leader's Meta-competencies**

The Army War College has recently developed meta-competencies from the long lists of leadership attributes most needed by leaders today. They have focused their efforts on strategic leaders but the idea extends beyond the senior field grades and General Officers. The six meta-competencies that the War College came up with are: Identity, Mental Agility, Cross-Cultural Savvy, Interpersonal Maturity, World-Class Warrior, and Professional Astuteness.<sup>34</sup> An interesting caveat was mentioned in the War College text, alluding to thinking creatively about the meanings of the terms. "[T]he six meta-competency labels were not developed as a stand-

alone list. The concepts behind the labels, not the labels themselves, are the focal points for leader development and assessment.”<sup>35</sup> They provided examples of the meta-competencies and highlighted a couple that, if taken literally, could possibly be misinterpreted. Cross-Cultural Savvy was one that nested well within the concept of mission command. It urges leaders not to think of culture only in terms of national boundaries, but to understand that it relates just as much to the organizational cultures within the services and agencies.

“Identity” was defined as the “ability to gather self- feedback, to form accurate self-perceptions, to understand self-concept, to change one’s self-concept as appropriate, to understand their values with maturation beyond self-awareness, and to understand who they are, not just how well they do things.”<sup>36</sup> The key here is the maturity that an individual must have to understand it’s more about the organization, than the individual. It is about what that person brings to bear with regard to job performance.

“Mental Agility” builds on the competency of adaptability. In conjunction with one’s ability to recognize change and act accordingly is the mental agility to think critically about an issue. “Cognitive skills” are required in the more ambiguous environment of the strategic level.<sup>37</sup> One could argue that, in the complex operating environment of today, tactical and operational leaders must possess mental agility, not just adaptability. In an organization of systems and processes mental agility allows a leader to recognize change or the need for change and its impact in any domain. Mentally Agile leaders are comfortable making important decisions with incomplete information. More importantly, they know when to act and when to experiment to validate beliefs or assumptions.<sup>38</sup> Most reconnaissance organizations operate effectively in this realm of uncertainty.

“Cross cultural savvy” refers to more than national culture, but also how to relate to organizational cultures between services and other governmental agencies.<sup>39</sup> It includes the ability to understand cultures beyond one’s organizational, economic, religious, societal, geographical, and political boundaries. This becomes increasingly important for leaders at every echelon. Teams and trust are built on a leader’s ability to operate across numerous cultural boundaries. Below is a great summary of why leaders must be cross culturally savvy.

While cross-cultural skills have been desirable in the past, they will be even more critical for future strategic leaders due to several factors. First, globalization has vastly increased interaction with other nations. Second, the global war on terrorism is illustrating that the Army must coordinate closely with other services, agencies, and organizations in the new national security environment. Third, the Army has traditionally been accused of being somewhat inept in its dealings with Congress and the media. As societal exposure to the military decreases, it becomes increasingly important for Army officers to tell the Army story to those outside the Army culture. Finally, although the U.S. remains the world’s only superpower, unilateral military action is becoming less common. Coalitions will continue to be vital to the security strategy.<sup>40</sup>

The paragraph above highlights many things the Army has to accomplish in the eyes of the public, the media, national environment, and to our partners as our military actions become less unilateral. Our ability to understand situations and people outside of our comfort zone and operate within someone else’s, allows for the development of multinational teams to accomplish a multitude of missions as we confront current and future challenges across the globe.

“Interpersonal maturity” is not just one’s ability to show compassion or relate to individuals. It also means to empower them. Developing a mutually respectful interpersonal maturity with subordinates is a complicated process. Maturity alludes to an individual’s level of professionalism, and, regardless of education, a mature and professional individual will do what is necessary to accomplish the mission or know when to ask for help if they don’t understand the intent. This maturity also describes a “self-starter” or someone who has the discipline needed to operate in a mission command environment. “[L]eaders must have the interpersonal maturity to

take responsibility for the development of the Army's future leaders... need to teach, coach, and mentor, while creating an environment where other leaders may do the same."<sup>41</sup>

The "world class warrior" is defined as a true professional who operates across domains and can operate at all echelons.<sup>42</sup> The world class warrior understands the importance of their actions and their impacts on national instruments of power. They use this knowledge to implement orders that are in accordance with the next echelon's approach.

"Professional Astuteness" is an understanding that the individual is not merely a member of the profession but a leader within the profession and must take the necessary steps to teach future leaders. Professionally astute individuals will accomplish the mission, understand the environment and do what is right for the profession and the nation.<sup>43</sup>

This list of six meta-competencies provides a foundation for leader development. These attributes help develop leaders who can operate within intent and understanding. They build trust based on experiences with each other. Leaders develop rapport with each other and build trust through common experiences. These attributes are building blocks that leaders at the battalion level need to begin with. The cultivation of these attributes begins with counseling. Counseling subordinates is discussed in every organization. Unfortunately, in almost every organization this is nothing more than performance counseling if a soldier failed to accomplish a goal. The counseling process needs to start with defining roles and responsibilities that outline the expectations of the individual. It also provides the counseled individual with expectations of how the leader will interact with them. When someone knows what is expected of them, there is a greater likelihood they will produce up to that standard. When the standard is not met this allows for a counseling and feedback loop. Understanding what went wrong allows for corrective actions sooner rather than later. This is a critical element within the mission command

system. The human domain must always be in a state of refinement. If it becomes stagnant the organization may become sluggish. If the unit is sluggish it won't be able to transmit mission orders to well intentioned troops to accomplish the mission. Dormant leadership does not have the situational awareness or understanding to accomplish the mission. Based on counseling, the commander can develop evaluation criteria for his subordinate leaders and staffs.

Evaluations are a valuable tool to cultivate the leadership attributes. Evaluations are not just those required annual or change of rater evaluations, but ones that provide feedback on a specific event. After action reviews are some of the most beneficial evaluations. They can be formal or informal but should always be based on training and evaluation outlines.<sup>44</sup> Training and evaluation outlines are identified from the mission essential task list and standards are defined in order to evaluate properly. It is crucial to have objective and professional evaluation criteria to promote the learning environment.

### **Conclusion:**

Mission command and everything it stands for are essential to how the Army will organize and operate in the future operational environment. There is a fundamental theme that runs through this paper; it is the importance of the human dynamic. Leaders must understand that human beings are the catalysts that run the processes that drive the systems. These individuals enable or inhibit the system from functioning properly. Mission command is a human endeavor and placing trust in individuals is the touchstone for mission command.<sup>45</sup> Many senior leaders see the benefit of mission command. They do, however, warn that in our current environment of training management, it may be very difficult to create a true mission command focused environment.<sup>46</sup>

The emphasis in this paper of what the commander does is to provide the field grades an understanding of the commander's inputs into the mission command processes. As the field

grades operationalize his intent or request from the commander additional guidance to drive the staff, it is essential they know how and when he will provide his input into the system. Many of the biases remain among current commanders and staffs as they operate their organizations under a “road to war” training structure where there is no space to develop mission orders and allow company commanders to think creatively and develop a training plan based on intent of the commander.<sup>47</sup> The current model is directive in nature and doesn’t allow for the inculcation of mission command. To educate and train represents only half the battle. Attempts to inculcate mission command currently only occur at the training centers. The training centers force the centralized planning and decentralized execution of mission orders and the commander must articulate his intent across multiple media to ensure his subordinate commanders understand the intent and then trust them to execute within his intent. These talented professionals can and will accomplish all tasks required of them. They will not allow the unit to fail.

The take a ways are that field grade officers must reinvigorate their junior leaders on the importance of training management, train with and be comfortable with doctrine, develop and embed mechanisms that will allow leaders to interact with one another, and develop leadership competencies that strengthen the organization. Mission command as a philosophy, a system and a warfighting function can become the keystone as the force becomes Joint Force 2020. The force has time to achieve that goal. The goals are not shortsighted, and identifying the shortfalls can be instrumental to making changes for the next generation of warriors. If learning institutions do not revise their curriculums appropriately, the force will not be able to inculcate soldiers with the essence of mission command. If the Armed Forces current training methodology does not change and provide the forcing functions necessary to have embedded mechanisms within the training methodology, leaders will not operate under mission command.

Finally, the evaluation system must provide objective feedback to the unit to improve itself. The evaluations of the leader must be nested within the leadership competencies and assist in the overall assessment of the leader to help shape the unit and the Army for the future.

## End notes

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<sup>1</sup> General Martin E. Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Mission Command White Paper*, Washington DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, April 3, 2012, 5

<sup>2</sup> Dempsey, 5

<sup>3</sup> Dempsey, 5

<sup>4</sup> General Martin E. Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Profession of Arms White Paper*, Washington DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 23, 2012, 3

<sup>5</sup> General Martin E. Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Mission Command White Paper*, Washington DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, April 3, 2012, 5

<sup>6</sup> Department of the Army, Headquarters, *ADRP 6-0: Mission Command*, Washington, DC: Department of the Army, May 2012, 1-1.

<sup>7</sup> ADRP 6-0, 1-4.

<sup>8</sup> Department of the Army, Joint Forces Headquarters, Joint Publication 3-31: Command and Control for Joint Land Operations, Washington, DC: Joint Staff, 29 June 2010, IV-11.

<sup>9</sup> ADRP 6-0, 1-4.

<sup>10</sup> ADRP 6-0, 1-5.

<sup>11</sup> Department of the Army, Headquarters, *ADRP 3-0: Unified Land Operations*, Washington, DC: Department of the Army, May 2012, Glossary- 7.

<sup>12</sup> ADRP 6-0, 1-5.

<sup>13</sup> ADRP 6-0, 1-5.

<sup>14</sup> Conversation with COL James J. Gallivan on phone, Quantico, VA: January 16, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> ADRP 5-0, 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> ADRP 5-0, 1-2.

<sup>17</sup> ADRP 6-0, 2-3.

<sup>18</sup> Department of the Army, Headquarters, *ADRP 5-0: The Operations Process*, Washington, DC: Department of the Army, May 2012, 1-3.

<sup>19</sup> ADRP 6-0, 2-2.

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- <sup>20</sup> Dialogue with Dr. Charles D. McKenna, Breckenridge Hall, Quantico, VA: February 5, 2013.
- <sup>21</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, edited by John Y. Simon, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant, Volume 10: January 1–May 31, 1864*, Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale, IL, 1982, 251-254.
- <sup>22</sup> Trends and observations as an Observer, Controller and Trainer at the National Training Center from January 2010 through June 2012, recorded during after action reviews at Battalion and Squadron level.
- <sup>23</sup> Leaders Professional Development Seminar, Fort Wainwright, AK: June 2007.
- <sup>24</sup> Author was an Observer, Controller/Trainer at National Training Center form Jan 2010-Jun 2012. During this time every AAR doctrinal references were used to highlight short falls in planning and execution of operations. Doctrine is the baseline for operations.
- <sup>25</sup> G.F. Deimel II, “The Return to Doctrine: Rediscovering the Bedrock of a Unit Training Program”, *ARMY Magazine*, September 2011, 23.
- <sup>26</sup> <https://atn.army.mil/>, last accessed February 7, 2013.
- <sup>27</sup> Army Official, “CAS3 to Merge with Advance Course”, *Army Reserve Magazine*, July 2004
- <sup>28</sup> Interview with Squadron Staff Member, National Training Center, CA, February 2012.
- <sup>29</sup> Litwin, G.H., and R.A.Stringer, *Motivation & Organizational Climate*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1968, 9-35.
- <sup>30</sup> Leaders Professional Development Seminar, Fort Wainwright, AK, November 2010.
- <sup>31</sup> Personal Counseling Session, June 2011.
- <sup>32</sup> Interview with student at common core ILE, January 2013.
- <sup>33</sup> Brown Bag Lecture, Arthur Corbett, October 2012.
- <sup>34</sup> Department of Command, Leadership, and Management, ed. Colonel Stephen A. Shambach, Director of Leader Development, *Strategic Leadership Primer 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, Carlisle, PA, 2004, 57.
- <sup>35</sup> Shambach, 57.
- <sup>36</sup> Shambach, 58.
- <sup>37</sup> Shambach, 59.

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<sup>38</sup> Shambach, 59.

<sup>39</sup> Shambach, 60.

<sup>40</sup> Shambach, 60.

<sup>41</sup> Shambach, 61.

<sup>42</sup> Shambach, 61.

<sup>43</sup> Shambach, 62.

<sup>44</sup> Dubik, Lieutenant General James M., “Mission Command and Army Training Doctrine”, ARMY Magazine, September 2012, 24.

<sup>45</sup> ADRP 5-0, 1-1.

<sup>46</sup> Dubik, 25.

<sup>47</sup> Dubik, 26.

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